



# **Pandemic Influenza:**

**What Business and Organization Leaders  
Need to Know About Pandemic Influenza Planning**



*State of Alaska*  
*Frank H. Murkowski, Governor*  
*Department of Health & Social Services*  
*Karleen K. Jackson, Commissioner*



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### Introduction

Imagine that 10 percent of your employees are too sick to come to work on any given day. Imagine that cumulatively, a quarter of your work force could be out for as many as three to four months. Imagine that the other businesses and organizations you rely on are facing the same massive absentee rates.

Hard as it may be to believe, such a scenario could happen — in fact, some health officials say it's inevitable. The cause: a flu pandemic.

### What a flu pandemic could mean to your organization

Each winter, seasonal influenza kills approximately 36,000 to 40,000 Americans, hospitalizes more than 200,000, and costs the United States economy over \$10 billion in lost productivity and direct medical expenses.

As bad as that is, health experts are now warning the nation about a far more lethal kind of flu — a pandemic flu that could kill over half a million in the United States. It could also hospitalize more than 2 million and cost our economy a staggering \$70 to \$160 billion.

Health officials are concerned that the “bird flu” emanating from Asia could mutate to a new strain of flu that humans have no natural immunity against, causing a pandemic flu. A pandemic flu would spread rapidly and easily from person to person, affecting all age groups. It would cause illness in a high proportion of those infected. The World Health Organization warns that a flu pandemic could infect between 25 and 30 percent of the world's population.

With that much of the population and work force affected, a flu pandemic would disrupt your organization — perhaps even force it to close down for a time.

This brochure offers guidance on how business and organization leaders can:

- » Prepare for a flu pandemic to maintain continuity of operations.
- » Help protect employees' health.
- » Work with health officials to minimize disruptions.

## Key differences between annual flu and pandemic flu

### Seasonal Flu

Occurs every year during the winter months.

Affects between 5 percent and 20 percent of the U.S. population.

Globally, kills between 500,000 and one million people each year; 36,000 to 40,000 in the U.S.

Most people recover within a week or two.

Deaths generally confined to “at risk” groups:

- » The elderly (over 65 years of age)
- » The young (children ages 6 to 23 months)
- » Those with existing medical conditions like lung diseases, diabetes, cancer, kidney or heart problems
- » People with compromised immune systems.

Vaccination is effective because the virus strain in circulation each winter usually can be reliably predicted.

When the correct virus strain is used, annual vaccination is fairly reliable and antiviral drugs are available for those who are most at risk of becoming seriously ill.

### Pandemic Flu

Occurs three to four times a century and can occur in any season.

Experts predict an infection rate of 25 percent to 50 percent of the population, depending on the severity of the virus strain.

The worst pandemic of the last century — the “Spanish Flu” of 1918 — killed 50 million worldwide and 500,000 people in the U.S.

Usually associated with a greater severity of illness and, consequently, a greater risk of death.

All age groups may be at risk for infection, not just “at risk” groups.

A vaccine against pandemic flu may not be available at the start of a pandemic. New strains of viruses must be accurately identified. Producing an effective vaccine could take up to six months.

Antiviral drugs may be in limited supply, and their effectiveness will only be definitively known once the pandemic is underway.

### What to do in the event of an outbreak

If a flu pandemic strikes, government health officials will issue information and warnings, and will work with the media to disseminate advice on how to avoid becoming ill. Your organization's managers, human resources department and employees should pay close attention to the guidance provided by the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services ([www.pandemicflu.alaska.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.alaska.gov)), local health departments and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)). Other organizations that provide assistance in public health emergencies include the American Red Cross ([www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org)) and the World Health Organization ([www.who.org](http://www.who.org)).

In a worst-case scenario, "business as usual" may cease. Government health officials may have to implement dramatic measures, including shutting down certain businesses that involve high levels of interaction with the public, such as restaurants and theaters. Health officials may also have to close schools, restrict travel, and cancel public events such as concerts, conventions, tribal gatherings and sports.

### Plan now to keep your business or organization going during a pandemic

"Continuity of operations" means ensuring that essential organization functions can survive a natural disaster, technological failure, human error, or other disruption. In recent times, assuring continuity of operations has also meant planning for terrorist-related biological, chemical or nuclear attacks.

Many existing continuity of operations plans anticipate disruptions such as fire, earthquake, and flood; these events are restricted to a certain geographic area, and the time frames are fairly well defined and limited. *A flu pandemic, however, demands a different set of continuity assumptions since it would be widely dispersed geographically and potentially arrive in waves that could last several months at a time.*

Depending on the flu strain and based on previous pandemics, public health officials project cumulative absentee rates of 25 percent to 30 percent over three to four months. Absentees will include sick employees and those who must care for others who are sick. Fear will also likely impact rates of absenteeism.



## Planning Checklist for Organizations

### 1. Plan for the impact that a pandemic may have on your organization:

Completed	In Progress	Not Started	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Select a pandemic coordinator and/or team with defined roles and responsibilities for preparedness and response planning. The planning process should include input from labor representatives.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Identify essential employees and other critical assets (raw material, suppliers, subcontractor services/products, and logistics) required to maintain operations during a pandemic.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Train and prepare alternate work force (contractors, employees in other job titles/ descriptions, retirees).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Develop and plan for scenarios likely to result in an increase or decrease in demand for your products and/or supplies during a pandemic (such as how a restriction on mass gatherings or the need for hygiene supplies will affect your organization).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Determine the potential impact that a pandemic would have on your organization's finances using multiple possible scenarios that affect different product lines or production sites.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Determine potential impact of quarantines and border closures on business-related domestic and international travel.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Find up-to-date, reliable pandemic information from community public health, emergency management, and other sources and make it available to your employees, suppliers, etc.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Establish an emergency communications plan and revise it periodically. This plan should include the names of key contacts (with backups), chain of communications (including suppliers and customers), and processes for tracking and communicating business and employee status.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Implement an exercise/drill to test your plan, and revise it periodically.

## 2. Plan for the impact of a pandemic on your employees and customers:

Completed In Progress Not Started

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Anticipate employee absences during a pandemic due to personal illness, family member illness, community containment measures and quarantines, school and business closures, and public transportation closures.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Implement guidelines to modify the frequency and type of face-to-face contact (hand-shaking, seating in meetings, office layout, shared workstations) among employees and between employees and customers (see CDC recommendations).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Encourage and track annual influenza vaccination for employees.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Evaluate employee access to health care services during a pandemic. Improve services as needed.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Evaluate employee access to and availability of mental health and social services during a pandemic; including corporate, community, and faith-based resources, and improve services as needed.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Identify employees and key customers with special needs, and incorporate the requirements of such persons into your preparedness plan.

## 3. Establish policies that will be implemented during a pandemic:

Completed In Progress Not Started

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Establish policies for employee compensation and sick leave absences that are unique to a pandemic (such as non-punitive, liberal leave); including policies on when a previously ill person is no longer infectious and can return to work after illness.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Establish policies for flexible worksite (telecommuting) and flexible work hours (staggered shifts).

3. continued

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<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Establish policies for preventing the spread of influenza at the worksite. Promote respiratory hygiene/cough etiquette, and send people with influenza symptoms home as quickly as possible.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Establish policies for employees who have been exposed to pandemic influenza, are suspected to be ill, or become ill at the worksite (such as infection control response, immediate mandatory sick leave).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Establish policies that restrict travel to affected geographic areas, both domestic and international sites. Evacuate employees who work in or near an affected area when an outbreak begins, and offer guidance for employees returning from affected areas (see CDC travel recommendations).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Set up authorities, triggers, and procedures for activating and terminating your organization's response plan. Alter operations (shut down operations in affected areas), and transfer operational knowledge to key employees.

4. Allocate resources to protect your employees, clients and customers during a pandemic:

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<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Provide an adequate amount of infection control supplies (hand-hygiene products, tissues and receptacles for their disposal) to all your organization's locations.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Augment communications and information technology infrastructures as needed to support employee telecommuting and remote customer access to your organization's products and services.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure availability of medical consultation and advice for emergency response.

5. Communicate with and educate your employees:

Completed In Progress Not Started

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Develop and disseminate programs and materials covering pandemic fundamentals (signs and symptoms of influenza and modes of transmission), personal and family protection and response strategies (such as hand hygiene, coughing/sneezing etiquette, contingency plans).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Anticipate employee fear and anxiety, rumors and misinformation, and plan communications accordingly.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure that communications are culturally appropriate.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Disseminate information to employees about your organization's pandemic preparedness and response plan.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Provide information for proper at-home care of ill employees and family members.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Develop platforms (such as hot lines, dedicated Web sites) for communicating pandemic status and actions to employees, vendors, suppliers, and customers in a consistent and timely way. Include redundancies in your emergency contact system.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Identify community sources for timely and accurate domestic and international pandemic information and resources for obtaining vaccines and antivirals.



6. Coordinate with other organizations and help your community:

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<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Collaborate with insurers, health plans and major local health care facilities to share your pandemic plans and understand their plans and capabilities.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Collaborate with federal, state, and local public health agencies and emergency responders to participate in their planning processes, share your pandemic plans, and understand their plans and capabilities.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Communicate with your local and state public health agencies and emergency responders about the assets and services your business could contribute to the community.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Share best practices with other organizations in your community — such as chambers of commerce and other associations — to improve community response efforts.

## Protecting employees' health

Flu is caused by viruses that infect the nose, throat and lungs. It is generally spread from person to person when an infected person coughs or sneezes. An effective vaccine, when available, will be the best safeguard against pandemic flu. In addition, the following simple, commonsense precautions should be shared with your work force and posted in common areas:

- » **Avoid close contact with people who are sick.** If you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick, too.
- » **Stay home when you're sick or have flu symptoms.** Get plenty of rest and check with a health care provider as needed.
- » **Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.** It may prevent those around you from getting sick.
- » **Clean your hands.** Washing your hands often will help protect you against germs. When soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizer.
- » **Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.** Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose or mouth.
- » **Practice other good health habits.** Be physically active, manage stress, drink plenty of fluids, eat nutritious foods, and avoid smoking, which may increase the risk of serious consequences if you do contract the flu.



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Alaska Department of Health and Social Services  
Office of the Commissioner  
P.O. Box 110601  
Juneau, AK 99811-0601